

IN THE CLAIMS

Cancel claims 1-20.

Add new claims 21-40 as follows:

1-20. (canceled)

21. (new) A computer implemented method by a financial institution, comprising:

- (a) receiving a request for a validation number to be associated with a check;
- (b) determining if an account contains sufficient funds to cover the monetary amount of the check; and
- (c) if the determination in (b) is affirmative, issuing a validation number to be associated with the check.

22. (new) A method according to claim 21, wherein the validation number is randomly generated by the financial institution.

23. (new) A method according to claim 21, wherein the validation number is derived using at least some information associated with the check.

24. (new) A method according to claim 23, wherein the at least some information associated with the check comprises:

- (i) a date of the check;
- (ii) a serial number of the check;
- (iii) an account number of the account;
- (iv) a monetary amount of the check;
- (v) a payee of the check;
- (vi) symbols identifying a drawee financial institution which maintains custody of the account; and

- (vii) a Uniform Resource Locator (URL).

25. (new) A method according to claim 21, further comprising:

- (d) allocating funds for payment of the monetary amount if the determination in (b) is affirmative.

26. (new) A method according to claim 25, wherein (d) comprises:

- (d-1) deducting the monetary amount from the account.

27. (new) A method according to claim 21, wherein the request identifies the account.

28. (new) A method according to claim 27, wherein (b) comprises:

- (b-1) verifying that the request was made by a party authorized to write checks on the account; and
- (b-2) verifying that the account contains sufficient funds to cover the monetary amount of the check.

29. (new) A method by a financial institution, comprising:

- (a) receiving from a first party over the Internet (i) a request for a validation number to be associated with a check and (ii) a monetary amount of the check;
- (b) determining if an account associated with the first party contains sufficient funds to cover the monetary amount of the check; and
- (c) if the determination in (b) is affirmative, issuing over the Internet a validation number to allow the first party to associate the issued validation number with the check.

30. (new) A method according to claim 29, further comprising:

(d) receiving from a second party the validation number which has been issued to the first party in (c);

(e) receiving from the second party at least some information associated with the check;

(f) determining if the validation number is valid based upon the at least some information received in (e); and

(g) if the determination in (f) is affirmative, issuing to the second party a confirmation that the validation number is valid.

31. (new) A method according to claim 30, wherein:

(i) the validation number in (d) and the at least some information in (e) are received over the Internet from the second party; and

(ii) the confirmation in (g) is issued over the Internet to the second party.

32. (new) A method according to claim 31, wherein the first party is a payor of the check, and the second party is a payee of the check.

33. (new) A method according to claim 29, wherein the validation number is randomly generated by the financial institution.

34. (new) A method according to claim 29, wherein the validation number is derived using at least some information associated with the check.

35. (new) A method according to claim 34, wherein the at least some information associated with the check comprises:

(i) a date of the check;

(ii) a serial number of the check;

(iii) an account number of the account;

- (iv) a monetary amount of the check;
- (v) a payee of the check;
- (vi) symbols identifying a drawee financial institution which maintains custody of the account; and
- (vii) a Uniform Resource Locator (URL).

36. (new) A method according to claim 29, further comprising:
 - (d) allocating funds for payment of the monetary amount if the determination in (b) is affirmative.
37. (new) A method according to claim 36, wherein (d) comprises:
 - (d-1) deducting the monetary amount from the account.
38. (new) A system comprising:
 - (a) means for receiving, from a first requestor, a request over the Internet for a validation number to be associated with a check;
 - (b) means for establishing a reference character sequence for the check;
 - (c) means for transmitting the reference character sequence to the first requestor over the Internet;
 - (d) means for receiving, from a second requestor, a proposed character sequence over the Internet; and
 - (e) if the proposed character sequence of (d) matches the reference character sequence (b), issuing a confirmation signal over the Internet to the second requestor.
39. (new) A method according to claim 38, wherein the validation number is randomly generated by a financial institution.

40. (new) A method according to claim 38, wherein the validation number is derived using at least some information associated with the check.